

INTERVIEW WITH JOHN PARVIN
WITH MRS. HELEN PARVIN
BY JERRY GROVER JANUARY 29, 2002

MR. GROVER: Why don't you introduce yourself, John?

MR. PARVIN: I am John R. Parvin. My middle name is Ray, without the "mond" on the end. It's just straight Ray.

MR. GROVER: When were you born?

MR. PARVIN: January 24, 1914. I was 88 as of last week.

MR. GROVER: Where were you born John?

MR. PARVIN: Gaston, Oregon.
, Oregon. So you are a native to the northwest.

MR. PARVIN: There's only one reason I was born there. My father was a manager of an apple orchard up in the Barkdale area. And my grandparents lived at Gaston, so my mother went home to have her brat.

MR. GROVER: Did you go to school in Gaston?

MR. PARVIN: No, I only stayed there long enough to get my diapers on and take off for Hood River.

MR. GROVER: So you grew up in Hood River?

MR. PARVIN: My dad was a hired manager. He would rather have farmed for himself so I grew up around this area.

MR. GROVER: Where did you go to school?

MR. PARVIN: High School? That was the old Vancouver High School at "26" and Main in Vancouver, Washington.

MR. GROVER: Did you go to College?

MR. PARVIN: Yes, and no. I took college courses wherever I was stationed. But I didn't have any opportunities to go to College. That was in the depth of the Depression. I was looking around for something to do. And I lived on a farm, but the farm wasn't big enough for more than one. My father had the farm. I thought about it and said that if I could find something, I would sink my teeth in, and do the best I could with it. I took all of the Civil Service exams that I could come across. One was for Apprentice Fish Culturist. It was with the old Bureau of Fisheries. In June of 1938 I was offered a

position at Spearfish. I was offered three or four positions, but that was the closest one. So by that time we had our daughter. She was a month old when we left to go to Spearfish, NFH, South Dakota. We drove. We had an old Essex. Have you ever seen an old Essex? They are one of the poorest cars you'll ever see. But anyway, we drove there and it took us a week to get there.

MRS. PARVIN: Ten days.

MR. PARVIN: Now you can do it in about twelve hours.

MR. GROVER: I see that your wife Helen is with you. Where did you meet Helen?

MR. PARVIN: What? [Mr. Parvin is hard of hearing]

MRS. PARVIN: Where did you meet me?

MR. PARVIN: She pushed my baby buggy! [Laughing]

MRS. PARVIN: I am three years older than he is. He has always told everyone that I pushed his baby buggy, but I don't think so.

MR. PARVIN: And I will say this; she was the best. The best thing that I ever got was her. She backed me to one hundred percent. We went to Spearfish, and I think that that was the best move that we ever made. She became her own person. She was just newly married and she was depending on her parents. She became her own person and made her own decisions. I think that was a great deal because it carried through then to thirty-seven years with the Fish and Wildlife Service, and/or the Bureau of Fisheries. Right now, we have been married for sixty-five years.

MR. GROVER: That's a fair amount of time! What did you first do when you first went to Spearfish?

MR. PARVIN: What was my first duty?

MR. GROVER: Yeah, what did they have you doing?

MR. PARVIN: Grinding fish food. That was the first assignment. We had a power machine like a sausage grinder that had a hopper. So you fed the livers and spleens and various things into that. Then you had a mixer similar to a portable cement mixer that you put it in and stirred up with salt. The salt bound the spleen. That was my first assignment. Oh, and my first Supervisor was Ted Kibbe. Have you heard of him?

MR. GROVER: No, I haven't heard of him.

MR. PARVIN: Well you better look. Ted Kibbe was, as far as I am concerned one of the best Supervisors you'll ever run across. He taught his people. He was a person who

believed in research. Ted Kibbe, K-I-B-B-E. I think he is long gone now. Because he was older than I am. He was transferred from Spearfish up to the new Hatchery in Bozeman, Montana. Of course, Bozeman has become a Research Station.

MR. GROVER: A Fishery Technology Center, they call it nowadays.

MR. PARVIN: Yeah. But he was transferred up there. And he operated and got that started. He was one that believed in research. And I believe one hundred percent in research.

MR. PARVIN: How long did you stay at Bozeman?

MRS. PARVIN: He was at Spearfish.

MR. GROVER: I am sorry, how long were you at Spearfish?

MR. PARVIN: Have you ever run across Fred J. Foster?

MR. GROVER: Yes, I know the name.

MR. PARVIN: He was the original Regional Supervisor out here. He was there when I came. I came out the second year on vacation to visit and so on. I took some annual leave and we came out here to the Portland area. I went up to Seattle where the Regional office was, to meet the guy. He transferred me the new Station at Carson. He didn't even let me go back to Spearfish. He was the Regional Director over the whole bit, so he can do that. They had a new Hatchery up at Carson. Well you know where it is.

MR. GROVER: I was Manager at Carson NFH. But that was in 1972. You must have been there in 1940.

MRS. PARVIN: Somewhere in there.

MR. PARVIN: Well, the records are there. But I am sure that it was in 1940 when I transferred to Carson. There was three...there were four people. There was Pop Meyers. We only knew him as Pop Meyers. He was the Manager, only he wasn't, he was Superintendent. Because he was in charge of not only Carson, but the lower Columbia River hatcheries there. There was the Little White Salmon, Big White Salmon and Carson NFH's were the three that he was over. We stayed at Carson a while, and I was transferred to the station out from Estacada, Oregon. It was Delf Creek at that time. It was a little trout hatchery, but we made a salmon hatchery out of it.

MR. GROVER: How long were you there?

MR. PARVIN: I was there two times, probably for a total of about five years.

MRS. PARVIN: That sounds right.

MR. PARVIN: This was during World War II and our Secretary of the Interior had all of us made exempt from military service because we were in food production because of the salmon. Then I was drafted and I sat there, and sat there and sat there. We got all ready for her [Mrs. Parvin] to be taken care of. By that time we had two children. And nothing happened. I got tired after a while and made a trip up to my original Draft Board, which was Carson. They said, "Oh, didn't we send you a notice that you were too old to be drafted?" I was all of thirty! I said, "No, you didn't." They told me that I had been deferred because of age. So I went back to work.

MR. GROVER: Were you at Delf Creek then?

MR. PARVIN: I was at Delf Creek.

MR. GROVER: How long did you stay there?

MR. PARVIN: Approximately five years. Delf Creek was one that kind of got me. I have a problem with, and I have had for many, many years, with blood circulation in my left leg. I was talked into having an injection for a varicose vein that I had. It got away from the doctor and clogged some other veins. I have a problem, and have had it. But I guess it doesn't have anything to do with longevity!

MR. GROVER: No! After Delf Creek, where did you go?

MR. PARVIN: Then I was involved with the Civilian Defense. I was very deeply involved with Civilian Defense. I said that if I was too old, I wasn't too old for that. So I did that as an extra to my job.

MR. GROVER: What kind of duties did you have for Civil Defense?

MR. PARVIN: What kind of duties? I organized the communities.

MR. GROVER: After that, where did you go for the Fish and Wildlife Service?

MR. PARVIN: I was transferred as Assistant Manager up on the Skagit River. Then to Leavenworth.

MR. GROVER: What grade were you at that time? Had you been promoted?

MR. PARVIN: We were all SP grades. There is no SP grades any more.

MR. GROVER: Not anymore.

MR. PARVIN: GS, General Schedule grades is what there is. I was a GS-5 at that time.

MR. GROVER: And an Assistant Manager?

MR. PARVIN: Yeah, but when the Bureau of Fisheries was transferred to the Interior Department, the grades went up. When I retired I was a GS-13.

MR. GROVER: Who was at Leavenworth when you were there?

MR. PARVIN: Fred Bittle was there, but he was under me.

MR. GROVER: So he worked for you? O. K.

MR. PARVIN: In fact, I was also in charge of Entiat 'til Roger Burrows came along and wanted it for a Research Station. So I was moved down under John Pelnar at Coleman.

MR. GROVER: When was that John?

MR. PARVIN: I was at Coleman twice. I was in charge of it once, the last time. And I was the Assistant Manager in charge of Production the first time. I think it was for four or five years. It was before Eagle Creek was built. I took over Eagle Creek.

MR. GROVER: About what year were you in Coleman?

MR. PARVIN: I know what year it was that I took over Eagle Creek. That was... [To Mrs. Parvin] you're going to have to tell me. You've got a better memory than I have.

MRS. PARVIN: For what?

MR. PARVIN: When did we move to Eagle Creek?

MRS. PARVIN: I don't remember.

MR. PARVIN: It was in 1936?

MRS. PARVIN: No, it couldn't have been in '36.

MR. GROVER: Eagle Creek wasn't built until almost the 1960's, I think.

MR. PARVIN: I started Eagle Creek.

MRS. PARVIN: I know. But honey, in 1936 we got married, remember?

MR. PARVIN: Oh yeah. 1946, O. K.

MR. GROVER: That was during the war years. It would have been after the war, wasn't it?

MR. PARVIN: No, I didn't move. I was there during the war, or part of the war. When you get 88, your memory slips a little bit, just off the top of your head.

MRS. PARVIN: When we moved to Eagle Creek it was just nothing but mud.

MR. GROVER: How long were you there at Eagle Creek John? What was your big program at Eagle Creek?

MR. PARVIN: I think we were there for about four or five years, is that right?

MRS. PARVIN: Something like that.

MR. PARVIN: Then I was transferred to Entiat to take that Station over when the Manager there retired. They called Managers...

MRS. PARVIN: We went to Leavenworth twice.

MR. PARVIN: Oh yes, I know.

MR. GROVER: You said that you started Eagle Creek National Fish Hatchery? How long were you there?

MR. PARVIN: I don't really now, but it was quiet a while.

MR. GROVER: But you were the Manager there?

MR. PARVIN: Yeah.

MR. GROVER: What was your program in? What fish were you raising?

MR. PARVIN: We were raising coho [salmon], chinooks, and steelhead trout. It was an anadromous hatchery. So now I am about out of information on that. Water supply was not a very good one. It was taken right out of Eagle Creek. And on a Thanksgiving Day, we had five inches of rain in the headwaters of Eagle Creek. It just flooded everything. We made some unscheduled releases because the water was over the ponds even.

MR. GROVER: Things haven't changed. They still do it. It still happens! They're cutting the trees up in the watershed and...

MR. PARVIN: I started Eagle Creek, and we had a lot of things, problems that I had never met before, but we made it. We got returns. We racked the Eagle Creek and forced the fish to go into the holding ponds. We carried on a program. We got our original stock of salmon at Delf Creek from the Clackamas River. We took it and double racked at section right at the mouth of Eagle Creek. And we took Eagle Creek fish, in other words, and took the eggs from them.

MR. GROVER: These were coho?

MR. PARVIN: No, they were spring chinook.

MR. GROVER: So the source of spring chinook at Eagle Creek came out of Delf Creek?

MR. PARVIN: Yeah. Delf Creek is a tributary of Eagle Creek.

MR. GROVER: Where did you after that John? Where was your next Station, or your next Hatchery?

MR. PARVIN: After I left the northwest I was offered a position at Lamar, Pennsylvania.

MR. GROVER: I had forgot that you had been back to Lamar.

MR. PARVIN: I was Manager. I think that they were scraping the bottom of the barrel. The Regional Supervisor for Hatcheries was trying to get somebody to operate Lamar. The largest Hatchery in Region 5 was Lamar. They finally offered it to me. And that was a wise deal for me because I operated successfully and made a good reputation in Region 5. From there I was offered a position back in Region 1 as the Manager of Coleman after John Pelnar retired. So I took that. For a "13" in that time, they required time in three regions before you were eligible for the "13" in the field. That made me three regions; 1, 2 and 5. I was eligible, and I was the only one they could find who was eligible. So I got Dworshak.

MR. GROVER: So from Coleman you went up to Dworshak? Dworshak was brand new.

MR. PARVIN: Yeah right.

MR. GROVER: You were the first Manager there.

MR. PARVIN: Yes, that's right.

MR. GROVER: And you retired from Dworshak in 1975?

MR. PARVIN: Yes, that's my career. But I thought that you wanted some interesting things about my first appointment.

MR. GROVER: I do, and I want to ask you some other questions too John.

MR. PARVIN: Go ahead.

MR. GROVER: I was going to ask you about some of the people that you hired. Did you hire anybody famous, or somebody that really did well? Or a bunch of them?

MR. PARVIN: You know as well as I do that you don't hire them. You get them referred to you, but you don't hire them directly. The only ones that you hire is your temporaries.

MR. GROVER: What about the ones that you developed or trained?

MR. PARVIN: I am trying to think.

MRS. PARVIN: Don Zirjack.

MR. PARVIN: Yeah, Don Zirjack was under me at Coleman NFH.

MR. GROVER: But he was a GS-9 then. He started out as a GS-1.

MR. PARVIN: Yeah, he was a "9" at Coleman.

MR. GROVER: What about some beginning ones. Did you have some new people that you trained?

MR. PARVIN: Oh, lot's of people!

MR. GROVER: Who were some of the really good ones that you had that turned out [to have] good careers?

MR. PARVIN: Your asking me to dig up memories that I am having a lot of trouble doing.

MR. GROVER: O.K.

MR. PARVIN: I trained a lot of people because I believed in training. I believe that Managers should also be teachers. Oh, Jack Kinchloe was one of them. I got him out of College and he thought that he knew the whole bit. But we found out that he didn't. I am not going to say anything but I had a lot of fun training him because when he first came he was very egotistical. He was out of College and has a degree. I let him go saw off a limb while he was on it, and things like that.

MR. GROVER: Jack had a successful career. He retired as Manager of Ridgefield NWR, and he had been for NMFS (National Marine Fisheries Service). He had been all around. He was a good hand, a good man.

MR. PARVIN: Kinchloe and I are very great friends. And he turned out to be a pretty good employee I am sure. But I took him out of College.

MR. GROVER: Can you remember some other people that you hired? Or that you trained, some young ones right out of school?

MR. PARVIN: He just didn't know all of the answers. Well there was a lot of time that we didn't know the answers. And that's why you take fish up to Seattle and you find amoeba or gyrodactylus, the leeches that were on the gills, the fresh ones. Eventually, at Dworshak, I had a lab under me.

MR. GROVER: Were you dealing with a virus?

MR. PARVIN: We had the virus a lot more that we thought we had. And in a lot more places too. Do you know how they were passing it out? We found that out too. They were using viscera from salmon cannery as part of the diet. And the virus was in that viscera. My name is on a paper with... who was the pathologist out of Seattle?

MRS. PARVIN: Burrows.

MR. GROVER: Burrows was a Nutritionist.

MR. PARVIN: Burrows was local.

MR. GROVER: There was Fred Fish up there, hum.

MR. PARVIN: Anyway, he was the authority. And he and I ran a bunch of experiments at Leavenworth. He and I wrote it up. My name is on that. We found the virus that was at Leavenworth and we found where it was coming from. It was coming from the viscera that was used in the diet. It came out of Alaska.

MR. GROVER: I can remember those days, but after they started pasteurizing the viscera they got rid of that particular disease.

MR. PARVIN: Pasteurizing was the next step. And the next step was pellets.

MR. GROVER: What other big issues were you working on? What other things did you do that was important, or that were problems for you, or for the Service or fish culture?

MR. PARVIN: I'd better not say this, turn it down again.

MR. GROVER: O.K.

MR. PARVIN: People again. [It was] jealousy between the managers at Leavenworth and Roger Burrows that was a problem. They were trying to cut each other's throats all of the time. I was in the middle. I was in charge of production.

MR. GROVER: What about the Regional office in Portland, did they do anything? The Supervisors in Portland, what did they do about it?

MR. PARVIN: I don't think they did anything. They eventually transferred the Manager to Washington, D.C. That's one way to get rid of them. Take and give them a promotion! And they have other things to worry about than personal deals.

MRS. PARVIN: May I say something now?

MR. GROVER: Helen, why don't you speak a minute. You look like you're getting ready.

MRS. PARVIN: I found the life of the hatchery man's wife, was rather lonesome. You can't make any good friends because the other people would accuse you of being partial. That's all I wanted to say.

MR. GROVER: But you worked at the hatcheries too.

MRS. PARVIN: I cut fins.

MR. GROVER: You cut fins? Did you feed fish when John was gone?

MRS. PARVIN: I fed fish when he was gone, there at Delf Creek.

MR. GROVER: Did you cook for the visitors? Any surprise lunches?

MRS. PARVIN: Yes. Well, did I have any other choice?

MR. GROVER: Did John surprise you often?

MRS. PARVIN: Not after a while. After I made a few comments, why, he didn't.

MR. PARVIN: She's leaving out a very important thing. And that is encouragement. She was my great encourager.

MRS. PARVIN: If I hadn't done that, he would have resigned a long time ago. A long time before he did. He wanted one hatchery so bad, and he didn't get it. "I'm going to retire!" he says. And I talked him out of it.

MR. GROVER: What hatchery was your great desire?

MR. PARVIN: The one that I thought I should have gotten?

MR. GROVER: Yes.

MR. PARVIN: The new one where the lab is now, the Abernathy Salmon Culture Technology Center.

MRS. PARVIN: I did a good thing then, encouraging him not to resign.

MR. GROVER: John, you said you had some stories to tell about Spearfish or something, for the record.

MR. PARVIN: You mean just stories?

MR. GROVER: Yes, reminiscing.

MR. PARVIN: You know, at the time when I took my oath of office, there was Leonard Hunt who was a Fish Culturist at that time. There was one other Fish Culturist who lived in that little house. I can't remember his name. He was a newspaperman and thought that he would try something else. Then when the war came they offered him a job as a war correspondent. He took that and left Fisheries entirely. But there was me, and two apprentices. There was the Fish Culturist, Leonard Hunt, and there was Ted Kibbe to begin with and John Harrington during that last part of my stay there. And a story...

I came out of the little house I was living in. You know there's a circular drive?

MR. GROVER: At the Hatchery?

MR. PARVIN: Yeah. I came out of the front door to do something, I don't know what. Leonard Hunt came running and he puts on his brakes. It was an oiled road. He squealed his tires and backed up and went around the other way. I asked him when I got over to the Hatchery, "What'd you do that for?" He says, "There was a black cat who ran across in front of me! And you don't ever run across a black cat's path!" I laughed and I was in his doghouse!

MRS. PARVIN: I have to tell you about this. We lived in a little house too, for a long time. That little tiny house?

MR. GROVER: I think that one is taken down now.

MR. PARVIN: I can tell one on Ted Kibbe. We were invited up for dinner and we had a little girl, Rose. She's much more than a little girl now. She is in her sixties. Anyway, she left a diaper up there. They had one boy, the Kibbe's did. At about ten-thirty or so in the evening there was a knock on the door. There was Ted Kibbe at the door with a diaper. He said, "You don't ever want to leave a diaper up here! We'll have another child!" There were considerable more superstitions then than there is now.

MRS. PARVIN: While we were living in that little house, I would go out and do my washing and hang it up. There was a great big black snake that'd come out of the stone wall and watch me, every time. I don't know what kind of snake it was. It wasn't poisonous. But it was a huge snake, about that big around, and long. He would come out every time I hung out clothes.

MR. GROVER: On most of your stations, did you live on the Hatchery?

MRS. PARVIN: Most of them, yes. As a matter of fact, we went to Leavenworth two or three different times.

MR. PARVIN: One winter morning, we woke up. It was a weekend and I wasn't on duty. We had to take turns being on duty on weekends.

MR. GROVER: Where?

MR. PARVIN: The sun was shining bright and the temperature gauge said thirty below zero. We went out and it seemed nice. We went out for a nice long hike in thirty below zero with snow on the ground. It was fun! Isn't that right, Mom?

MRS. PARVIN: That's right. The snow was so light, it just lifted around us.

MR. GROVER: What did you think about hatchery living? Do you have stories about living on hatcheries? Did you like it?

MR. PARVIN: Knowing that I was going to move around a lot, why, I didn't mind it at all. The only drawback is that you have a problem trying to establish a home for retirement.

MRS. PARVIN: We had four children, and it was a problem to keep them in school. You had to transfer so often.

MR. PARVIN: We ended up with this double wide as a retirement home. And the other situation, it works two ways; I don't know how it... finally they gave us a blanket pay of one quarter of a GS-10, for being on call.

MR. GROVER: That's what they call "stand by". That was all part of hatchery living.

MR. PARVIN: Is that still there?

MR. GROVER: No. That got appealed back in the 1970's sometime. About the time you retired, they got away from standby pay. Somebody had ruled that it was against the law to pay people to be "engaged to wait". You had to either pay them overtime, or let them go do something. But you couldn't have them just "standing by."

MR. PARVIN: I have a good retirement and the GS-13 with thirty-seven years, plus that twenty-five percent went into my high five. It made a pretty good retirement. You can quite often tell how much interest the people have, the employees have, in seeing that the job works or how much they bitch about getting up in the night.

MR. GROVER: It sounds like you were a fan of the Fish and Wildlife Service, one that liked the Fish and Wildlife Service.

MR. PARVIN: Oh yes! From the word go, I was treated like one of the people of the FWS by the Supervisors. I appreciated that. I was not just somebody on the outside doing a job. I was part of it. I hope that that is still there. I am sure it is or you wouldn't have it. I am sure that the FWS, with the Refuge deal, and the other set-ups have a lot of that. It so happens ... when we were up on the Skagit River, we had a lot of problems with poaching and so on. I carried a card; it said I was a Law Enforcement Officer, unlike yours. In order to enforce the anti-poaching laws I had to be down on the Skagit Flats where they were poaching. The locals were poaching on the river.

MR. GROVER: Was it all fishing, or were they picking on ducks too?

MR. PARVIN: If I saw any poaching on ducks, I was supposed to handle it. But basically it was fish. I was there because of the fish. I was supposed to be an expert. Which I wasn't! One thing that Ted Kibbe told me, he said, "if any of your Supervisors say that they want you to do something and you don't know how to do it, just don't tell 'em you don't know how to do it. Just get busy and find out to do it in a hurry!"

MRS. PARVIN: Another interesting thing about the poaching; he went out one time and found out that somebody had a fish line down through the fence. They were pulling the fish up through the fence.

MR. PARVIN: The only reason that I could qualify with 'experience' was because I had lived on farm, and I had to be able to meet problems as they arose. They took that as experience. So I had a 'seventy' rating on experience, and I got a ninety-seven on the written exam!

MR. GROVER: So you got hired?

MR. PARVIN: They hired me. It worked out very well as far as I am concerned. Going out and getting married during the depression, and having a family and so on to take care of. And having the support of FWS, as well as my wife, it worked out very well. That's all I can say. There are not too many "13s" in the field when I retired.

MR. GROVER: It was you, I remember. Now there's quite a few, some "14s" and some "15s". You wouldn't move for a higher grade?

MR. PARVIN: I was offered positions in Washington, but that's a desk job. And I am not a deskman. I had enough of a desk job as it was.

MRS. PARVIN: He wouldn't ask any of his employees to do something that he wouldn't do himself.

MR. PARVIN: And another thing, I would rather raise my children on a fish hatchery than in towns.